THE WILD KNIGHT



G. K. Chesterton.

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BY G. K. CHESTERTON

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With Additional Poems



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NOTE

My thanks are due to the Editors of the *Outlook* and the *Speaker* for the kind permission they have given me to reprint a considerable number of the following poems. They have been selected and arranged rather with a view to unity of spirit than to unity of time or value; many of them being juvenile.

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PREFATORY NOTE

I LEAVE these verses as they stand, although they contain innumerable examples of what I now see to be errors of literature, and one or two examples of what I have come to think errors of opinion. But they never had any great merit beyond genuineness, and I do not wish to spoil that by mixing up two periods of my life. On two definite matters here embodied in verse I have altered my opinion; and if I mention what they are I really do not mean it for egoism, but only for honesty.

In the matter of the 'Anglo-American Alliance,'[1] I have come to see that our hopes of brotherhood with America are the same in kind as our hopes of brotherhood with any other of the great independent nations of Christendom. And a very small study of history was

[1] 'An Alliance,' p. 70.

sufficient to show me that the American nation, which is a hundred years old, is at least fifty years older than the Anglo-Saxon race.

And in the matter of the Dreyfus[1] case, while not having been able to reach any final conclusion about the proper verdict on the individual, I have come largely to attribute the difficulty of doing so to the acrid and irrational unanimity of the English press. My position may be roughly stated thus: There may have been a fog of injustice in the French courts; I know that there was a fog of injustice in the English newspapers. For the rest, there are verses which I cannot take so seriously as to alter them. The man who wrote them was honest; and he had the same basic views as myself. Besides, nobody need read the book: I certainly beg to be excused.

G. K. C.

BATTERSEA, 1905.

[1] 'To a Certain Nation,' p. 92.

Another tattered rhymster in the ring,
With but the old plea to the sneering schools,
That on him too, some secret night in spring,
Came the old frenzy of a hundred fools

To make some thing: the old want dark and deep,
The thirst of men, the hunger of the stars,
Since first it tinged even the Eternal's sleep,
With monstrous dreams of trees and towns and wars.

When all He made for the first time He saw,
Scattering stars as misers shake their pelf.
Then in the last strange wrath broke His own law,
And made a graven image of Himself.

BY THE BABE UNBORN

If trees were tall and grasses short,
  As in some crazy tale,
If here and there a sea were blue
  Beyond the breaking pale,

If a fixed fire hung in the air
  To warm me one day through,
If deep green hair grew on great hills,
  I know what I should do.

In dark I lie: dreaming that there
  Are great eyes cold or kind,
And twisted streets and silent doors,
  And living men behind.

BY THE BABE UNBORN

Let storm-clouds come: better an hour,
  And leave to weep and fight,
Than all the ages I have ruled
  The empires of the night.

I think that if they gave me leave
  Within that world to stand,
I would be good through all the day
  I spent in fairyland.

They should not hear a word from me
  Of selfishness or scorn,
If only I could find the door,
  If only I were born.

THE WORLD'S LOVER

My eyes are full of lonely mirth :
  Reeling with want and worn with scars,
For pride of every stone on earth,
  I shake my spear at all the stars.

A live bat beats my crest above,
  Lean foxes nose where I have trod,
And on my naked face the love
  Which is the loneliness of God.

Outlawed : since that great day gone by—
  When before prince and pope and queen
I stood and spoke a blasphemy—
  'Behold the summer leaves are green.'

THE WORLD'S LOVER

They cursed me: what was that to me
  Who in that summer darkness furled,
With but an owl and snail to see,
  Had blessed and conquered all the world?

They bound me to the scourging-stake,
  They laid their whips of thorn on me;
I wept to see the green rods break,
  Though blood be beautiful to see.

Beneath the gallows' foot abhorred
  The crowds cry 'Crucify!' and 'Kill!'
Higher the priests sing, 'Praise the Lord,
  The warlock dies'; and higher still

Shall heaven and earth hear one cry sent
  Even from the hideous gibbet height,
'Praise to the Lord Omnipotent,
  The vultures have a feast to-night.'

THE SKELETON

CHATTERING finch and water-fly
Are not merrier than I;
Here among the flowers I lie
Laughing everlastingly.
No: I may not tell the best;
Surely, friends, I might have guessed
Death was but the good King's jest,
  It was hid so carefully.

A CHORD OF COLOUR

My Lady clad herself in grey,
  That caught and clung about her throat ;
Then all the long grey winter day
  On me a living splendour smote ;
And why grey palmers holy are,
  And why grey minsters great in story,
And grey skies ring the morning star,
  And grey hairs are a crown of glory.

My Lady clad herself in green,
  Like meadows where the wind-waves pass ;
Then round my spirit spread, I ween,
  A splendour of forgotten grass.

Then all that dropped of stem or sod,
  Hoarded as emeralds might be,
I bowed to every bush, and trod
  Amid the live grass fearfully.

My Lady clad herself in blue,
  Then on me, like the seer long gone,
The likeness of a sapphire grew,
  The throne of him that sat thereon.
Then knew I why the Fashioner
  Splashed reckless blue on sky and sea;
And ere 'twas good enough for her,
  He tried it on Eternity.

Beneath the gnarled old Knowledge-tree
  Sat, like an owl, the evil sage:
'The World's a bubble,' solemnly
  He read, and turned a second page.

'A bubble, then, old crow,' I cried,
'God keep you in your weary wit!
'A bubble—have you ever spied
'The colours I have seen on it?

THE HAPPY MAN

To teach the grey earth like a child,
  To bid the heavens repent,
I only ask from Fate the gift
  Of one man well content.

Him will I find: though when in vain
  I search the feast and mart,
The fading flowers of liberty,
  The painted masks of art.

I only find him at the last,
  On one old hill where nod
Golgotha's ghastly trinity—
  Three persons and one god.

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

I DO not cry, beloved, neither curse.
  Silence and strength, these two at least are good.
  He gave me sun and stars and aught He could,
But not a woman's love; for that is hers.

He sealed her heart from sage and questioner—
  Yea, with seven seals, as he has sealed the grave.
  And if she give it to a drunken slave,
The Day of Judgment shall not challenge her.

Only this much: if one, deserving well,
  Touching your thin young hands and making suit,
  Feel not himself a crawling thing, a brute,
Buried and bricked in a forgotten hell;

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

Prophet and poet be he over sod,
   Prince among angels in the highest place,
   God help me, I will smite him on the face,
Before the glory of the face of God.

A NOVELTY

WHY should I care for the Ages
  Because they are old and grey?
To me, like sudden laughter,
  The stars are fresh and gay;
The world is a daring fancy,
  And finished yesterday.

Why should I bow to the Ages
  Because they were drear and dry?
Slow trees and ripening meadows
  For me go roaring by,
A living charge, a struggle
  To escalade the sky.

A NOVELTY

The eternal suns and systems,
  Solid and silent all,
To me are stars of an instant,
  Only the fires that fall
From God's good rocket, rising
  On this night of carnival.

ULTIMATE

THE vision of a haloed host
  That weep around an empty throne ;
And, aureoles dark and angels dead,
  Man with his own life stands alone.

'I am,' he says his bankrupt creed ;
  'I am,' and is again a clod :
The sparrow starts, the grasses stir,
  For he has said the name of God.

THE DONKEY

THE DONKEY

WHEN fishes flew and forests walked
   And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
   Then surely I was born ;

With monstrous head and sickening cry
   And ears like errant wings,
The devil's walking parody
   On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,
   Of ancient crooked will ;
Starve, scourge, deride me : I am dumb,
   I keep my secret still.

THE DONKEY

Fools! For I also had my hour;
  One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
  And palms before my feet.

THE BEATIFIC VISION

THROUGH what fierce incarnations, furled
  In fire and darkness, did I go,
Ere I was worthy in the world
  To see a dandelion grow?

Well, if in any woes or wars
  I bought my naked right to be,
Grew worthy of the grass, nor gave
  The wren, my brother, shame for me.

But what shall God not ask of him
  In the last time when all is told,
Who saw her stand beside the hearth,
  The firelight garbing her in gold?

THE HOPE OF THE STREETS

THE still sweet meadows shimmered : and I stood
And cursed them, bloom of hedge and bird of tree,
And bright and high beyond the hunch-backed wood
The thunder and the splendour of the sea.

Give back the Babylon where I was born,
The lips that gape give back, the hands that grope,
And noise and blood and suffocating scorn
An eddy of fierce faces—and a hope

That 'mid those myriad heads one head find place,
With brown hair curled like breakers of the sea,
And two eyes set so strangely in the face
That all things else are nothing suddenly.

ECCLESIASTES

THERE is one sin: to call a green leaf grey,
Whereat the sun in heaven shuddereth.
There is one blasphemy: for death to pray,
For God alone knoweth the praise of death.

There is one creed: 'neath no world-terror's wing
Apples forget to grow on apple-trees.
There is one thing is needful—everything—
The rest is vanity of vanities.

THE SONG OF THE CHILDREN

THE World is ours till sunset,
Holly and fire and snow ;
And the name of our dead brother
Who loved us long ago.

The grown folk mighty and cunning,
They write his name in gold ;
But we can tell a little
Of the million tales he told.

He taught them laws and watchwords,
To preach and struggle and pray ;
But he taught us deep in the hayfield
The games that the angels play.

THE SONG OF THE CHILDREN

Had he stayed here for ever,
  Their world would be wise as ours—
And the king be cutting capers,
  And the priest be picking flowers.

But the dark day came: they gathered:
  On their faces we could see
They had taken and slain our brother,
  And hanged him on a tree.

THE FISH

DARK the sea was : but I saw him,
One great head with goggle eyes,
Like a diabolic cherub
Flying in those fallen skies.

I have heard the hoarse deniers,
I have known the wordy wars ;
I have seen a man, by shouting,
Seek to orphan all the stars.

I have seen a fool half-fashioned
Borrow from the heavens a tongue,
So to curse them more at leisure—
—And I trod him not as dung.

THE FISH

For I saw that finny goblin
  Hidden in the abyss untrod ;
And I knew there can be laughter
  On the secret face of God.

Blow the trumpets, crown the sages,
  Bring the age by reason fed !
(' He that sitteth in the heavens,
  ' He shall laugh '—the prophet said.)

GOLD LEAVES

Lo! I am come to autumn,
  When all the leaves are gold;
Grey hairs and golden leaves cry out
  The year and I are old.

In youth I sought the prince of men,
  Captain in cosmic wars,
Our Titan, even the weeds would show
  Defiant, to the stars.

But now a great thing in the street
  Seems any human nod,
Where shift in strange democracy
  The million masks of God.

GOLD LEAVES

In youth I sought the golden flower
  Hidden in wood or wold,
But I am come to autumn,
  When all the leaves are gold.

THOU SHALT NOT KILL

I HAD grown weary of him ; of his breath
And hands and features I was sick to death.
Each day I heard the same dull voice and tread ;
I did not hate him : but I wished him dead.
And he must with his blank face fill my life—
Then my brain blackened, and I snatched a knife.

But ere I struck, my soul's grey deserts through
A voice cried, 'Know at least what thing you do.
'This is a common man : knowest thou, O soul,
'What this thing is ? somewhere where seasons roll
'There is some living thing for whom this man
'Is as seven heavens girt into a span,
'For some one soul you take the world away—
'Now know you well your deed and purpose. Slay !'

THOU SHALT NOT KILL

Then I cast down the knife upon the ground
And saw that mean man for one moment crowned.
I turned and laughed : for there was no one by—
The man that I had sought to slay was I.

A CERTAIN EVENING

THAT night the whole world mingled,
The souls were babes at play,
And angel danced with devil,
And God cried, 'Holiday!'

The sea had climbed the mountain peaks,
And shouted to the stars
To come to play: and down they came
Splashing in happy wars.

The pine grew apples for a whim,
The cart-horse built a nest;
The oxen flew, the flowers sang,
The sun rose in the west.

A CERTAIN EVENING

And 'neath the load of many worlds,
  The lowest life God made
Lifted his huge and heavy limbs
  And into heaven strayed.

To where the highest life God made
  Before His presence stands;
But God Himself cried, 'Holiday!'
  And she gave me both her hands.

A MAN AND HIS IMAGE

ALL day the nations climb and crawl and pray
  In one long pilgrimage to one white shrine,
Where sleeps a saint whose pardon, like his peace,
  Is wide as death, as common, as divine.

His statue in an aureole fills the shrine,
  The reckless nightingale, the roaming fawn,
Share the broad blessing of his lifted hands,
  Under the canopy, above the lawn.

But one strange night, a night of gale and flood,
  A sound came louder than the wild wind's tone;
The grave-gates shook and opened: and one stood
  Blue in the moonlight, rotten to the bone.

Then on the statue, graven with holy smiles,
  There came another smile—tremendous—one
Of an Egyptian god. 'Why should you rise?
  'Do I not guard your secret from the sun?

'The nations come; they kneel among the flowers
  Sprung from your blood, blossoms of May and June,
Which do not poison them—is it not strange?
  Speak!' And the dead man shuddered in the moon.

'Shall I not cry the truth?'—the dead man cowered—
  'Is it not sad, with life so tame and cold,
That earth should fade into the sun's white fires
  With the best jest in all its tales untold?

'If I should cry that in this shrine lie hid
  Stories that Satan from his mouth would spew;
Wild tales that men in hell tell hoarsely—speak!
  Saint and Deliverer! Should I slander you?'

A MAN AND HIS IMAGE

Slowly the cowering corse reared up its head,
  'Nay, I am vile . . . but when for all to see,
You stand there, pure and painless—death of life!
  Let the stars fall—I say you slander me!

'You make me perfect, public, colourless;
  You make my virtues sit at ease—you lie!
For mine were never easy—lost or saved,
  I had a soul—I was. And where am I?

'Where is my good? the little real hoard,
  The secret tears, the sudden chivalries;
The tragic love, the futile triumph—where?
  Thief, dog, and son of devils—where are these?

'I will lift up my head: in leprous loves
  Lost, and the soul's dishonourable scars—
By God, I was a better man than This
  That stands and slanders me to all the stars.

A MAN AND HIS IMAGE

'Come down!' And with an awful cry, the corse
  Sprang on the sacred tomb of many tales,
And stone and bone, locked in a loathsome strife,
  Swayed to the singing of the nightingales.

Then one was thrown: and where the statue stood
  Under the canopy, above the lawn,
The corse stood; grey and lean, with lifted hands
  Raised in tremendous welcome to the dawn.

'Now let all nations climb and crawl and pray;
  Though I be basest of my old red clan,
They shall not scale, with cries or sacrifice,
  The stature of the spirit of a man.'

THE MARINER

THE violet scent is sacred
Like dreams of angels bright;
The hawthorn smells of passion
Told in a moonless night.

But the smell is in my nostrils,
Through blossoms red or gold,
Of my own green flower unfading,
A bitter smell and bold.

The lily smells of pardon,
The rose of mirth; but mine
Smells shrewd of death and honour,
And the doom of Adam's line.

THE MARINER

The heavy scent of wine-shops
  Floats as I pass them by,
But never a cup I quaff from,
  And never a house have I.

Till dropped down forty fathoms,
  I lie eternally ;
And drink from God's own goblet
  The green wine of the sea.

THE TRIUMPH OF MAN

I plod and peer amid mean sounds and shapes,
I hunt for dusty gain and dreary praise,
And slowly pass the dismal grinning days,
Monkeying each other like a line of apes.

What care? There was one hour amid all these
When I had stripped off like a tawdry glove
My starriest hopes and wants, for very love
Of time and desolate eternities.

Yea, for one great hour's triumph, not in me
Nor any hope of mine did I rejoice,
But in a meadow game of girls and boys
Some sunset in the centuries to be.

CYCLOPEAN

A MOUNTAINOUS and mystic brute
No rein can curb, no arrow shoot,
Upon whose doomed deformèd back
I sweep the planets' scorching track.

Old is the elf, and wise, men say,
His hair grows green as ours grows grey;
He mocks the stars with myriad hands,
High as that swinging forest stands.

But though in pigmy wanderings dull
I scour the deserts of his skull,
I never find the face, eyes, teeth,
Lowering or laughing underneath.

CYCLOPEAN

I met my foe in an empty dell,
His face in the sun was naked hell.
I thought, 'One silent, bloody blow,
No priest would curse, no crowd would know.'

Then cowered: a daisy, half concealed,
Watched for the fame of that poor field;
And in that flower and suddenly
Earth opened its one eye on me.

JOSEPH

If the stars fell; night's nameless dreams
  Of bliss and blasphemy came true,
If skies were green and snow were gold,
  And you loved me as I love you;

O long light hands and curled brown hair,
  And eyes where sits a naked soul;
Dare I even then draw near and burn
  My fingers in the aureole?

Yes, in the one wise foolish hour
  God gives this strange strength to a man.
He can demand, though not deserve,
  Where ask he cannot, seize he can.

JOSEPH

But once the blood's wild wedding o'er,
  Were not dread his, half dark desire,
To see the Christ-child in the cot,
  The Virgin Mary by the fire?

MODERN ELFLAND

I cut a staff in a churchyard copse,
  I clad myself in ragged things,
I set a feather in my cap
  That fell out of an angel's wings.

I filled my wallet with white stones,
  I took three foxgloves in my hand,
I slung my shoes across my back,
  And so I went to fairyland.

But lo, within that ancient place
  Science had reared her iron crown,
And the great cloud of steam went up
  That telleth where she takes a town.

But cowled with smoke and starred with lamps
That strange land's light was still its own;
The word that witched the woods and hills
Spoke in the iron and the stone.

Not Nature's hand had ever curved
That mute unearthly porter's spine.
Like sleeping dragon's sudden eyes
The signals leered along the line.

The chimneys thronging crooked or straight
Were fingers signalling the sky;
The dog that strayed across the street
Seemed four-legged by monstrosity.

'In vain,' I cried, 'though you too touch
The new time's desecrating hand,
Through all the noises of a town
I hear the heart of fairyland.'

MODERN ELFLAND

I read the name above a door,
  Then through my spirit pealed and passed
'This is the town of thine own home,
  And thou hast looked on it at last.'

ETERNITIES

I CANNOT count the pebbles in the brook.
Well hath He spoken: 'Swear not by thy head,
Thou knowest not the hairs,' though He, we read,
Writes that wild number in His own strange book.

I cannot count the sands or search the seas,
Death cometh, and I leave so much untrod.
Grant my immortal aureole, O my God,
And I will name the leaves upon the trees.

In heaven I shall stand on gold and glass,
Still brooding earth's arithmetic to spell;
Or see the fading of the fires of hell
Ere I have thanked my God for all the grass.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

The Christ-child lay on Mary's lap,
His hair was like a light.
(O weary, weary were the world,
But here is all aright.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's breast,
His hair was like a star.
(O stern and cunning are the kings,
But here the true hearts are.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's heart,
His hair was like a fire.
(O weary, weary is the world,
But here the world's desire.)

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

The Christ-child stood at Mary's knee,
His hair was like a crown,
And all the flowers looked up at Him,
And all the stars looked down.

ALONE

BLESSINGS there are of cradle and of clan,
Blessings that fall of priests' and princes' hands;
But never blessing full of lives and lands,
Broad as the blessing of a lonely man.

Though that old king fell from his primal throne,
And ate among the cattle, yet this pride
Had found him in the deepest grass, and cried
An 'Ecce Homo' with the trumpets blown.

And no mad tyrant, with almighty ban,
Who in strong madness dreams himself divine,
But hears through fumes of flattery and of wine
The thunder of this blessing name him man.

ALONE

Let all earth rot past saints' and seraphs' plea,
Yet shall a Voice cry through its last lost war,
'This is the world, this red wreck of a star,
That a man blessed beneath an alder-tree.'

KING'S CROSS STATION

THIS circled cosmos whereof man is god
  Has suns and stars of green and gold and red,
And cloudlands of great smoke, that range o'er range
  Far floating, hide its iron heavens o'erhead.

God! shall we ever honour what we are,
  And see one moment ere the age expire,
The vision of man shouting and erect,
  Whirled by the shrieking steeds of flood and fire?

Or must Fate act the same grey farce again,
  And wait, till one, amid Time's wrecks and scars,
Speaks to a ruin here, 'What poet-race
  Shot such cyclopean arches at the stars?'

THE HUMAN TREE

MANY have Earth's lovers been,
Tried in seas and wars, I ween ;
Yet the mightiest have I seen :
  Yea, the best saw I.
One that in a field alone
Stood up stiller than a stone
  Lest a moth should fly.

Birds had nested in his hair,
On his shoon were mosses rare,
Insect empires flourished there,
  Worms in ancient wars ;
But his eyes burn like a glass,
Hearing a great sea of grass
  Roar towards the stars.

THE HUMAN TREE

From them to the human tree
Rose a cry continually,
'Thou art still, our Father, we
  Fain would have thee nod.
Make the skies as blood below thee,
Though thou slay us, we shall know thee.
  Answer us, O God!

'Show thine ancient fame and thunder,
Split the stillness once asunder,
Lest we whisper, lest we wonder
  Art thou there at all?'
But I saw him there alone,
Standing stiller than a stone
  Lest a moth should fall.

TO THEM THAT MOURN

(W. E. G., May 1898)

LIFT up your heads: in life, in death,
God knoweth his head was high.
Quit we the coward's broken breath
Who watched a strong man die.

If we must say, 'No more his peer
Cometh; the flag is furled.'
Stand not too near him, lest he hear
That slander on the world.

The good green earth he loved and trod
Is still, with many a scar,
Writ in the chronicles of God,
A giant-bearing star.

TO THEM THAT MOURN

He fell: but Britain's banner swings
  Above his sunken crown.
Black death shall have his toll of kings
  Before that cross goes down.

Once more shall move with mighty things
  His house of ancient tale,
Where kings whose hands were kissed of kings
  Went in: and came out pale.

O young ones of a darker day,
  In art's wan colours clad,
Whose very love and hate are grey—
  Whose very sin is sad,

Pass on: one agony long-drawn
  Was merrier than your mirth,
When hand-in-hand came death and dawn,
  And spring was on the earth.

THE OUTLAW

PRIEST, is any song-bird stricken?
  Is one leaf less on the tree?
Is this wine less red and royal
  That the hangman waits for me?

He upon your cross that hangeth,
  It is writ of priestly pen,
On the night they built His gibbet,
  Drank red wine among His men.

Quaff, like a brave man, as He did,
  Wine and death as heaven pours—
This is my fate: O ye rulers,
  O ye pontiffs, what is yours?

THE OUTLAW

To wait trembling, lest yon loathly
  Gallows-shape whereon I die,
In strange temples yet unbuilded,
  Blaze upon an altar high.

BEHIND

I SAW an old man like a child,
His blue eyes bright, his white hair wild,
Who turned for ever, and might not stop,
Round and round like an urchin's top.

'Fool,' I cried, 'while you spin round,
'Others grow wise, are praised, are crowned.'
Ever the same round road he trod,
'This is better: I seek for God.'

'We see the whole world, left and right,
'Yet at the blind back hides from sight
'The unseen Master that drives us forth
'To East and West, to South and North.

BEHIND

'Over my shoulder for eighty years
I have looked for the gleam of the sphere of spheres.'
'In all your turning, what have you found?'
'At least, I know why the world goes round.'

THE END OF FEAR

Though the whole heaven be one-eyed with the moon,
Though the dead landscape seem a thing possessed,
Yet I go singing through that land oppressed
As one that singeth through the flowers of June.

No more, with forest-fingers crawling free
O'er dark flint wall that seems a wall of eyes,
Shall evil break my soul with mysteries
Of some world-poison maddening bush and tree.

No more shall leering ghosts of pimp and king
With bloody secrets veiled before me stand.
Last night I held all evil in my hand
Closed: and behold it was a little thing.

THE END OF FEAR

I broke the infernal gates and looked on him
Who fronts the strong creation with a curse ;
Even the god of a lost universe,
Smiling above his hideous cherubim.

And pierced far down in his soul's crypt unriven
The last black crooked sympathy and shame,
And hailed him with that ringing rainbow name
Erased upon the oldest book in heaven.

Like emptied idiot masks, sin's loves and wars
Stare at me now : for in the night I broke
The bubble of a great world's jest, and woke
Laughing with laughter such as shakes the stars.

THE HOLY OF HOLIES

'ELDER father, though thine eyes
Shine with hoary mysteries,
Canst thou tell what in the heart
Of a cowslip blossom lies?

'Smaller than all lives that be,
Secret as the deepest sea,
Stands a little house of seeds,
Like an elfin's granary.

'Speller of the stones and weeds,
Skilled in Nature's crafts and creeds,
Tell me what is in the heart
Of the smallest of the seeds.'

'God Almighty, and with Him
Cherubim and Seraphim,
Filling all eternity—
Adonai Elohim.'

THE MIRROR OF MADMEN

I DREAMED a dream of heaven, white as frost,
The splendid stillness of a living host ;
Vast choirs of upturned faces, line o'er line.
Then my blood froze ; for every face was mine.

Spirits with sunset plumage throng and pass,
Glassed darkly in the sea of gold and glass.
But still on every side, in every spot,
I saw a million selves, who saw me not.

I fled to quiet wastes, where on a stone,
Perchance, I found a saint, who sat alone ;
I came behind : he turned with slow, sweet grace,
And faced me with my happy, hateful face.

THE MIRROR OF MADMEN

I cowered like one that in a tower doth bide,
Shut in by mirrors upon every side;
Then I saw, islanded in skies alone
And silent, one that sat upon a throne.

His robe was bordered with rich rose and gold,
Green, purple, silver out of sunsets old;
But o'er his face a great cloud edged with fire,
Because it covereth the world's desire.

But as I gazed, a silent worshipper,
Methought the cloud began to faintly stir;
Then I fell flat, and screamed with grovelling head,
'If thou hast any lightning, strike me dead!

'But spare a brow where the clean sunlight fell,
The crown of a new sin that sickens hell.
Let me not look aloft and see mine own
Feature and form upon the Judgment-throne.'

Then my dream snapped : and with a heart that leapt
I saw across the tavern where I slept,
The sight of all my life most full of grace,
A gin-damned drunkard's wan half-witted face.

E. C. B.

Before the grass grew over me,
  I knew one good man through and through,
And knew a soul and body joined
  Are stronger than the heavens are blue.

A wisdom worthy of thy joy,
  O great heart, read I as I ran;
Now, though men smite me on the face,
  I cannot curse the face of man.

I loved the man I saw yestreen
  Hanged with his babe's blood on his palms.
I loved the man I saw to-day
  Who knocked not when he came with alms.

E. C. B.

Hush!—for thy sake I even faced
  The knowledge that is worse than hell;
And loved the man I saw but now
  Hanging head downwards in the well.

THE DESECRATERS

WITNESS all: that unrepenting,
  Feathers flying, music high,
I go down to death unshaken
  By your mean philosophy.

For your wages, take my body,
  That at least to you I leave;
Set the sulky plumes upon it,
  Bid the grinning mummers grieve.

Stand in silence: steep your raiment
  In the night that hath no star;
Don the mortal dress of devils,
  Blacker than their spirits are.

THE DESECRATERS

Since ye may not, of your mercy,
  Ere I lie on such a hearse,
Hurl me to the living jackals
  God hath built for sepulchres.

AN ALLIANCE

THIS is the weird of a world-old folk,
  That not till the last link breaks,
Not till the night is blackest,
  The blood of Hengist wakes.
When the sun is black in heaven,
  The moon as blood above,
And the earth is full of hatred,
  This people tells its love.

In change, eclipse, and peril,
  Under the whole world's scorn,
By blood and death and darkness
  The Saxon peace is sworn ;

AN ALLIANCE

That all our fruit be gathered,
  And all our race take hands,
And the sea be a Saxon river
  That runs through Saxon lands.

Lo ! not in vain we bore him ;
  Behold it ! not in vain,
Four centuries' dooms of torture
  Choked in the throat of Spain,
Ere priest or tyrant triumph—
  We know how well—we know-
Bone of that bone can whiten,
  Blood of that blood can flow.

Deep grows the hate of kindred,
  Its roots take hold on hell ;
No peace or praise can heal it,
  But a stranger heals it well.

AN ALLIANCE

Seas shall be red as sunsets,
  And kings' bones float as foam,
And heaven be dark with vultures,
  The night our son comes home.

THE ANCIENT OF DAYS

THE ANCIENT OF DAYS

A CHILD sits in a sunny place,
  Too happy for a smile,
And plays through one long holiday
  With balls to roll and pile;
A painted wind-mill by his side
  Runs like a merry tune,
But the sails are the four great winds of heaven,
  And the balls are the sun and moon.

A staring doll's-house shows to him
  Green floors and starry rafter,
And many-coloured graven dolls
  Live for his lonely laughter.

THE ANCIENT OF DAYS

The dolls have crowns and aureoles,
  Helmets and horns and wings,
For they are the saints and seraphim,
  The prophets and the kings.

THE LAST MASQUERADE

A WAN new garment of young green
  Touched, as you turned your soft brown hair ;
  And in me surged the strangest prayer
Ever in lover's heart hath been.

That I who saw your youth's bright page,
  A rainbow change from robe to robe,
  Might see you on this earthly globe,
Crowned with the silver crown of age.

Your dear hair powdered in strange guise,
  Your dear face touched with colours pale ;
  And gazing through the mask and veil
The mirth of your immortal eyes.

THE EARTH'S SHAME

NAME not his deed: in shuddering and in haste
We dragged him darkly o'er the windy fell:
That night there was a gibbet in the waste,
And a new sin in hell.

Be his deed hid from commonwealths and kings,
By all men born be one true tale forgot;
But three things, braver than all earthly things,
Faced him and feared him not.

Above his head and sunken secret face
Nested the sparrow's young and dropped not dead.
From the red blood and slime of that lost place
Grew daisies white, not red.

THE EARTH'S SHAME

And from high heaven looking upon him,
  Slowly upon the face of God did come
A smile the cherubim and seraphim
    Hid all their faces from.

VANITY

A WAN sky greener than the lawn,
  A wan lawn paler than the sky.
She gave a flower into my hand,
  And all the hours of eve went by.

Who knows what round the corner waits
  To smite? If shipwreck, snare, or slur
Shall leave me with a head to lift,
  Worthy of him that spoke with her.

A wan sky greener than the lawn,
  A wan lawn paler than the sky.
She gave a flower into my hand,
  And all the days of life went by.

VANITY

Live ill or well, this thing is mine,
  From all I guard it, ill or well.
One tawdry, tattered, faded flower
  To show the jealous kings in hell.

THE LAMP POST

LAUGH your best, O blazoned forests,
  Me ye shall not shift or shame
With your beauty: here among you
  Man hath set his spear of flame.

Lamp to lamp we send the signal,
  For our lord goes forth to war;
Since a voice, ere stars were builded,
  Bade him colonise a star.

Laugh ye, cruel as the morning,
  Deck your heads with fruit and flower,
Though our souls be sick with pity,
  Yet our hands are hard with power.

THE LAMP POST

We have read your evil stories,
  We have heard the tiny yell
Through the voiceless conflagration
  Of your green and shining hell.

And when men, with fires and shouting,
  Break your old tyrannic pales;
And where ruled a single spider
  Laugh and weep a million tales.

This shall be your best of boasting:
  That some poet, poor of spine,
Full and sated with our wisdom,
  Full and fiery with our wine,

Shall steal out and make a treaty
  With the grasses and the showers,
Rail against the grey town-mother,
  Fawn upon the scornful flowers;

THE LAMP POST

Rest his head among the roses,
  Where a quiet song-bird sounds,
And no sword made sharp for traitors,
  Hack him into meat for hounds.

THE PESSIMIST

You that have snarled through the ages, take your answer and go—
I know your hoary question, the riddle that all men know.
You have weighed the stars in a balance, and grasped the skies in a span:
Take, if you must have answer, the word of a common man.

Deep in my life lies buried one love unhealed, unshriven,
One hunger still shall haunt me—yea, in the streets of heaven;
This is the burden, babbler, this is the curse shall cling,
This is the thing I bring you; this is the pleasant thing.

'Gainst you and all your sages, no joy of mine shall
strive,
This one dead self shall shatter the men you call alive.
My grief I send to smite you, no pleasure, no belief,
Lord of the battered grievance, what do you know of
grief?

I only know the praises to heaven that one man gave,
That he came on earth for an instant, to stand beside a
grave,
The peace of a field of battle, where flowers are born of
blood.
I only know one evil that makes the whole world good.

Beneath this single sorrow the globe of moon and
sphere
Turns to a single jewel, so bright and brittle and dear

That I dread lest God should drop it, to be dashed into
stars below.

. . . . . .

You that have snarled through the ages, take your
answer and go.

A FAIRY TALE

All things grew upwards, foul and fair:
The great trees fought and beat the air
With monstrous wings that would have flown;
But the old earth clung to her own,
Holding them back from heavenly wars,
Though every flower sprang at the stars.

But he broke free: while all things ceased,
Some hour increasing, he increased.
The town beneath him seemed a map,
Above the church he cocked his cap,
Above the cross his feather flew
Above the birds: and still he grew.

A FAIRY TALE

The trees turned grass; the clouds were riven;
His feet were mountains lost in heaven;
Through strange new skies he rose alone,
The earth fell from him like a stone,
And his own limbs beneath him far
Seemed tapering down to touch a star.

He reared his head, shaggy and grim,
Staring among the cherubim;
The seven celestial floors he rent,
One crystal dome still o'er him bent:
Above his head, more clear than hope,
All heaven was a microscope.

A PORTRAIT

FAIR faces crowd on Christmas night
  Like seven suns a-row,
But all beyond is the wolfish wind
  And the crafty feet of the snow.

But through the rout one figure goes
  With quick and quiet tread;
Her robe is plain, her form is frail—
  Wait if she turn her head.

I say no word of line or hue,
  But if that face you see,
Your soul shall know the smile of faith's
  Awful frivolity.

A PORTRAIT

Know that in this grotesque old masque
  Too loud we cannot sing,
Or dance too wild, or speak too wide
  To praise a hidden thing.

That though the jest be old as night,
  Still shaketh sun and sphere
An everlasting laughter
  Too loud for us to hear.

FEMINA CONTRA MUNDUM

THE sun was black with judgment, and the moon
Blood: but between
I saw a man stand, saying, 'To me at least
The grass is green.

'There was no star that I forgot to fear
With love and wonder.
The birds have loved me'; but no answer came—
Only the thunder.

. . . . . .

Once more the man stood, saying, 'A cottage door,
Wherethrough I gazed
That instant as I turned—yea, I am vile;
Yet my eyes blazed.

'For I had weighed the mountains in a balance,
And the skies in a scale,
I come to sell the stars—old lamps for new—
Old stars for sale.'

Then a calm voice fell all the thunder through,
A tone less rough :
'Thou hast begun to love one of my works
Almost enough.'

TO A CERTAIN NATION

WE will not let thee be, for thou art ours.
  We thank thee still, though thou forget these things,
For that hour's sake when thou didst wake all powers
  With a great cry that God was sick of kings.

Leave thee there grovelling at their rusted greaves,
  These hulking cowards on a painted stage,
Who, with imperial pomp and laurel leaves,
  Show their Marengo—one man in a cage.

These, for whom stands no type or title given
  In all the squalid tales of gore and pelf;
Though cowed by crashing thunders from all heaven,
  Cain never said, 'My brother slew himself.'

TO A CERTAIN NATION

Tear you the truth out of your drivelling spy,
  The maniac whom you set to swing death's scythe.
Nay; torture not the torturer—let him lie:
  What need of racks to teach a worm to writhe?

Bear with us, O our sister, not in pride,
  Nor any scorn we see thee spoiled of knaves,
But only shame to hear, where Danton died,
  Thy foul dead kings all laughing in their graves.

Thou hast a right to rule thyself; to be
  The thing thou wilt; to grin, to fawn, to creep;
To crown these clumsy liars; ay, and we
  Who knew thee once, we have a right to weep.

THE PRAISE OF DUST

'What of vile dust?' the preacher said.
  Methought the whole world woke,
The dead stone lived beneath my foot,
  And my whole body spoke.

'You, that play tyrant to the dust,
  And stamp its wrinkled face,
This patient star that flings you not
  Far into homeless space.

'Come down out of your dusty shrine
  The living dust to see,
The flowers that at your sermon's end
  Stand blazing silently.

THE PRAISE OF DUST

'Rich white and blood-red blossom; stones,
  Lichens like fire encrust;
A gleam of blue, a glare of gold,
  The vision of the dust.

'Pass them all by: till, as you come
  Where, at a city's edge,
Under a tree—I know it well—
  Under a lattice ledge,

'The sunshine falls on one brown head.
  You, too, O cold of clay,
Eater of stones, may haply hear
  The trumpets of that day

'When God to all his paladins
  By his own splendour swore
To make a fairer face than heaven,
  Of dust and nothing more.'

THE BALLAD OF THE BATTLE OF GIBEON

Five kings rule o'er the Amorite,
Mighty as fear and old as night;
Swathed with unguent and gold and jewel,
Waxed they merry and fat and cruel.
Zedek of Salem, a terror and glory,
Whose face was hid while his robes were gory;
And Hoham of Hebron, whose loathly face is
Heavy and dark o'er the ruin of races;
And Piram of Jarmuth, drunk with strange wine,
Who dreamed he had fashioned all stars that shine;
And Debir of Eglon wild, without pity,
Who raged like a plague in the midst of his city;
And Japhia of Lachish, a fire that flameth,
Who did in the daylight what no man nameth.

THE BATTLE OF GIBEON

These five kings said one to another,
'King unto king o'er the world is brother,
Seeing that now, for a sign and a wonder,
A red eclipse and a tongue of thunder,
A shape and a finger of desolation,
Is come against us a kingless nation.
Gibeon hath failed us: it were not good
That a man remember where Gibeon stood.'
Then Gibeon sent to our captain, crying,
'Son of Nun, let a shaft be flying,
For unclean birds are gathering greedily;
Slack not thy hand, but come thou speedily.
Yea, we are lost save thou maintain'st us,
For the kings of the mountains are gathered against us.'

Then to our people spake the Deliverer,
'Gibeon is high, yet a host may shiver her;
Gibeon hath sent to me crying for pity,
For the lords of the cities encompass the city

With chariot and banner and bowman and lancer,
And I swear by the living God I will answer.
Gird you, O Israel, quiver and javelin,
Shield and sword for the road we travel in;
Verily, as I have promised, pay I
Life unto Gibeon, death unto Ai.'

Sudden and still as a bolt shot right
Up on the city we went by night.
Never a bird of the air could say,
'This was the children of Israel's way.'
Only the hosts sprang up from sleeping,
Saw from the heights a dark stream sweeping;
Sprang up straight as a great shout stung them,
And heard the Deliverer's war-cry among them,
Heard under cupola, turret, and steeple
The awful cry of the kingless people.

Started the weak of them, shouted the strong of them,
Crashed we a thunderbolt into the throng of them,

THE BATTLE OF GIBEON

Blindly with heads bent, and shields forced before us,
We heard the dense roar of the strife closing o'er us.
And drunk with the crash of the song that it sung
them,
We drove the great spear-blade in God's name among
them.

Redder and redder the sword-flash fell,
Our eyes and our nostrils were hotter than hell;
Till full all the crest of the spear-surge shocking us,
Hoham of Hebron cried out mocking us,
'Nay, what need of the war-sword's plying,
Out of the desert the dust comes flying.
A little red dust, if the wind be blowing—
Who shall reck of its coming or going?'
Back the Deliverer spake as a clarion,
'Mock at thy slaves, thou eater of carrion!
Laughest thou at us, in thy kingly clowning,
We, that laughed upon Ramases frowning,

We that stood up proud, unpardoned,
When his face was dark and his heart was hardened?
Pharaoh we knew and his steeds, not faster
Than the word of the Lord in thine ear, O master.'
Sheer through the turban his wantons wove him,
Clean to the skull the Deliverer clove him;
And the two hosts reeled at the sign appalling,
As the great king fell like a great house falling.

Loudly we shouted, and living and dying,
Bore them all backward with strength and strong
crying;
And Caleb struck Zedek hard at the throat,
And Japhia of Lachish Zebulon smote.
The war-swords and axes were clashing and groaning,
The fallen were fighting and foaming and moaning,
The war-spears were breaking, the war-horns were bray-
ing,
Ere the hands of the slayers were sated with slaying.

And deep in the grasses grown gory and sodden,
The treaders of all men were trampled and trodden ;
And over them, routed and reeled like cattle,
High over the turn of the tide of the battle,
High over noises that deafen and cover us,
Rang the Deliverer's voice out over us.

'Stand thou still, thou sun upon Gibeon,
Stand thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon !
Shout thou, people, a cry like thunder,
For the kings of the earth are broken asunder.
Now we have said as the thunder says it,
Something is stronger than strength and slays it.
Now we have written for all time later,
Five kings are great, yet a law is greater.
Stare, O sun ! in thine own great glory,
This is the turn of the whole world's story.
Stand thou still, thou sun upon Gibeon,
Stand thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon !

'Smite! amid spear-blades blazing and breaking,
More than we know of is rising and making.
Stab with the javelin, crash with the car!
Cry! for we know not the thing that we are.
Stand, O sun! that in horrible patience
Smiled on the smoke and the slaughter of nations.
Thou shalt grow sad for a little crying,
Thou shalt be darkened for one man's dying—
Stand thou still, thou sun upon Gibeon,
Stand thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon!'

After the battle was broken and spent
Up to the hill the Deliverer went,
Flung up his arms to the storm-clouds flying,
And cried unto Israel, mightily crying,
'Come up, O warriors! come up, O brothers!
Tribesmen and herdsmen, maidens and mothers;
The bondman's son and the bondman's daughter,
The hewer of wood and the drawer of water,

He that carries and he that brings,
And set your foot on the neck of kings.'

This is the story of Gibeon fight—
Where we smote the lords of the Amorite;
Where the banners of princes with slaughter were sodden,
And the beards of seers in the rank grass trodden;
Where the trees were wrecked by the wreck of cars,
And the reek of the red field blotted the stars;
Where the dead heads dropped from the swords that
sever,
Because His mercy endureth for ever.

'VULGARISED'

ALL round they murmur, 'O profane,
  Keep thy heart's secret hid as gold';
But I, by God, would sooner be
  Some knight in shattering wars of old,

In brown outlandish arms to ride,
  And shout my love to every star
With lungs to make a poor maid's name
  Deafen the iron ears of war.

Here, where these subtle cowards crowd,
  To stand and so to speak of love,
That the four corners of the world
  Should hear it and take heed thereof.

'VULGARISED'

That to this shrine obscure there be
  One witness before all men given,
As naked as the hanging Christ,
  As shameless as the sun in heaven.

These whimperers—have they spared to us
  One dripping woe, one reeking sin?
These thieves that shatter their own graves
  To prove the soul is dead within.

They talk; by God, is it not time
  Some of Love's chosen broke the girth,
And told the good all men have known
  Since the first morning of the earth?

THE BALLAD OF GOD-MAKERS

A BIRD flew out at the break of day
  From the nest where it had curled,
And ere the eve the bird had set
  Fear on the kings of the world.

The first tree it lit upon
  Was green with leaves unshed;
The second tree it lit upon
  Was red with apples red;

The third tree it lit upon
  Was barren and was brown,
Save for a dead man nailed thereon
  On a hill above a town.

THE BALLAD OF GOD-MAKERS

That night the kings of the earth were gay
And filled the cup and can;
Last night the kings of the earth were chill
For dread of a naked man.

'If he speak two more words,' they said,
'The slave is more than the free;
'If he speak three more words,' they said,
'The stars are under the sea.'

Said the King of the East to the King of the West,
I wot his frown was set,
'Lo, let us slay him and make him as dung,
It is well that the world forget.'

Said the King of the West to the King of the East,
I wot his smile was dread,
'Nay, let us slay him and make him a god,
It is well that our god be dead.'

THE BALLAD OF GOD-MAKERS

They set the young man on a hill,
  They nailed him to a rod;
And there in darkness and in blood
  They made themselves a god.

And the mightiest word was left unsaid,
  And the world had never a mark,
And the strongest man of the sons of men
  Went dumb into the dark.

Then hymns and harps of praise they brought,
  Incense and gold and myrrh,
And they thronged above the seraphim,
  The poor dead carpenter.

'Thou art the prince of all,' they sang,
  'Ocean and earth and air.'
Then the bird flew on to the cruel cross,
  And hid in the dead man's hair.

THE BALLAD OF GOD-MAKERS

'Thou art the sun of the world,' they cried,
'Speak if our prayers be heard.'
And the brown bird stirred in the dead man's hair,
And it seemed that the dead man stirred.

Then a shriek went up like the world's last cry
From all nations under heaven,
And a master fell before a slave
And begged to be forgiven.

They cowered, for dread in his wakened eyes
The ancient wrath to see;
And the bird flew out of the dead Christ's hair,
And lit on a lemon-tree.

AT NIGHT

How many million stars there be,
That only God hath numberéd ;
But this one only chosen for me
In time before her face was fled.
Shall not one mortal man alive
Hold up his head ?

THE WOOD-CUTTER

We came behind him by the wall,
My brethren drew their brands,
And they had strength to strike him down—
And I to bind his hands.

Only once, to a lantern gleam,
He turned his face from the wall,
And it was as the accusing angel's face
On the day when the stars shall fall.

I grasped the axe with shaking hands,
I stared at the grass I trod;
For I feared to see the whole bare heavens
Filled with the face of God.

THE WOOD-CUTTER

I struck : the serpentine slow blood
In four arms soaked the moss—
Before me, by the living Christ,
The blood ran in a cròss.

Therefore I toil in forests here
And pile the wood in stacks,
And take no fee from the shivering folk
Till I have cleansed the axe.

But for a curse God cleared my sight,
And where each tree doth grow
I see a life with awful eyes,
And I must lay it low.

ART COLOURS

ART COLOURS

On must we go: we search dead leaves,
  We chase the sunset's saddest flames,
The nameless hues that o'er and o'er
  In lawless wedding lost their names.

God of the daybreak! Better be
  Black savages; and grin to gird
Our limbs in gaudy rags of red,
  The laughing-stock of brute and bird;

And feel again the fierce old feast,
  Blue for seven heavens that had sufficed,
A gold like shining hoards, a red
  Like roses from the blood of Christ.

THE TWO WOMEN

Lo! very fair is she who knows the ways
Of joy: in pleasure's mocking wisdom old,
The eyes that might be cold to flattery, kind;
The hair that might be grey with knowledge, gold.

But thou art more than these things, O my queen,
For thou art clad in ancient wars and tears.
And looking forth, framed in the crown of thorns,
I saw the youngest face in all the spheres.

THE WILD KNIGHT

THE wasting thistle whitens on my crest,
The barren grasses blow upon my spear,
A green, pale pennon: blazon of wild faith
And love of fruitless things: yea, of my love,
Among the golden loves of all the knights,
Alone: most hopeless, sweet, and blasphemous,
The love of God:
I hear the crumbling creeds
Like cliffs washed down by water, change, and pass;
I hear a noise of words, age after age,
A new cold wind that blows across the plains,
And all the shrines stand empty; and to me
All these are nothing: priests and schools may doubt

Who never have believed; but I have loved.
Ah friends, I know it passing well, the love
Wherewith I love; it shall not bring to me
Return or hire or any pleasant thing—
Ay, I have tried it: Ay, I know its roots.
Earthquake and plague have burst on it in vain
And rolled back shattered—
Babbling neophytes!
Blind, startled fools—think you I know it not?
Think you to teach me? Know I not His ways?
Strange-visaged blunders, mystic cruelties.
All! all! I know Him, for I love Him. Go!

So, with the wan waste grasses on my spear,
I ride for ever, seeking after God.
My hair grows whiter than my thistle plume,
And all my limbs are loose; but in my eyes
The star of an unconquerable praise:
For in my soul one hope for ever sings,

That at the next white corner of a road
My eyes may look on Him. . . .
Hush—I shall know
The place when it is found: a twisted path
Under a twisted pear-tree—this I saw
In the first dream I had ere I was born,
Wherein He spoke. . . .
But the grey clouds come down
In hail upon the icy plains: I ride,
Burning for ever in consuming fire.

A dark manor-house shuttered and unlighted, outlined against a sunset: in front a large, but neglected, garden. To the righ the foreground, the porch of a chapel, with coloured wind lighted. Hymns within.

Above the porch a grotesque carved bracket, supporting a lam Astride of it sits CAPTAIN REDFEATHER, *a flagon in his ha*

REDFEATHER

I have drunk to all I know of,
To every leaf on the tree,
To the highest bird of the heavens,
To the lowest fish of the sea.
What toast, what toast remaineth,
Drunk down in the same good wine,
By the tippler's cup in the tavern,
And the priest's cup at the shrine?

[*A Priest comes out, stick in hand, and looks righ and left.*]

VOICES WITHIN

The brawler . . .

PRIEST

He has vanished

REDFEATHER

To the stars.

[*The Priest looks up.*]

PRIEST [*angrily*]

What would you there, sir?

REDFEATHER

Give you all a toast.

[*Lifts his flagon. More priests come out.*]

I see my life behind me: bad enough—
Drink, duels, madness, beggary, and pride,
The life of the unfit: yet ere I drop

On Nature's rubbish heap, I weigh it all,
And give you all a toast—

[*Reels to his feet and stands.*]

The health of God!

[*They all recoil from him.*]

Let's give the Devil of the Heavens His due!
He that made grass so green, and wine so red,
Is not so black as you have painted Him.

[*Drinks.*]

PRIEST

Blaspheming profligate!

REDFEATHER [*hurls the flagon among them*]

Howl! ye dumb dogs,
I named your King—let me have one great shout,
Flutter the seraphim like startled birds;
Make God recall the good days of His youth
Ere saints had saddened Him: when He came back

Conqueror of Chaos in a six days' war,
With all the sons of God shouting for joy . . .

PRIEST

And you—what is your right, and who are you,
To praise God?

REDFEATHER

A lost soul. In earth or heaven
What has a better right?

PRIEST

Go, pagan, go!
Drink, dice, and dance: take no more thought than blind
Beasts of the field. . . .

REDFEATHER

Or . . . lilies of the field,
To quote a pagan sage. I go my way.

PRIEST [*solemnly*]

And when Death comes . . .

REDFEATHER

He shall not find me dead.

[*Puts on his plumed hat. The priests go out.*]

REDFEATHER

These frozen fools . . .

[*The Lady Olive comes out of the chapel. He sees her.*]

Oh, they were right enough,
Where shall I hide my carrion from the sun?

[*Buries his face. His hat drops to the ground.*]

OLIVE [*looking up*]

Captain, are you from church? I saw you not.

REDFEATHER

No, I am here.

[*Lays his hand on a gargoyle.*]

I, too, am a grotesque,
And dance with all the devils on the roof.

OLIVE [*with a strange smile*]

For Satan, also, I have often prayed.

REDFEATHER [*roughly*]

Satan may worry women if he will,
For he was but an angel ere he fell,
But I—before I fell—I was a man.

OLIVE

He too, my Master, was a man: too strong
To fear a strong man's sins: 'tis written He
Descended into hell.

REDFEATHER

Write, then, that I

[*Leaps to the ground before her.*]

Descended into heaven . . .

You are ill ?

OLIVE

No, well . . .

REDFEATHER

You speak the truth—you are the Truth—
Lady, say once again then, 'I am *well.*'

OLIVE

I—ah ! God give me grace—I am nigh dead.

REDFEATHER [*quietly*]

Lord Orm ?

OLIVE

Yes—yes.

REDFEATHER

Is in your father's house—
Having the title-deeds—would drive you forth,

Homeless, and with your father sick to death,
Into this winter, save on a condition
Named . . .

OLIVE

And unnameable. Even so ; Lord Orm-
Ah ! do you know him ?

REDFEATHER

Ay, I saw him once.
The sun shone on his face, that smiled and smiled,
A sight not wholesome to the eyes of man.

OLIVE

Captain, I tell you God once fell asleep,
And in that hour the world went as it would ;
Dogs brought forth cats, and poison grew in grapes,
And Orm was born . . .

REDFEATHER

Why, curse him ! Can he not
Be kicked or paid ?

OLIVE [*feverishly*]

Hush ! He is just behind
There in the house—see how the great house glares,
Glares like an ogre's mask—the whole dead house
Possessed with bestial meaning. . . .

[*Screams.*]

Ah ! the face !
The whole great grinning house—his face ! his face !
His face !

REDFEATHER [*in a voice of thunder, pointing away from the house*]

Look there—look there !

OLIVE

What is it ? What ?

REDFEATHER

I think it was a bird.

OLIVE

What thought you, truly?

REDFEATHER

I think a mighty thought is drawing near.

[*Enter* THE WILD KNIGHT.]

THE WILD KNIGHT

That house . . .

[*Points.*]

OLIVE

Ah Christ! [*Shudders.*] I had forgotten it.

THE WILD KNIGHT [*still pointing*]

That house! the house at last, the house of God,
Wherein God makes an evening feast for me.

The house at last: I know the twisted path
Under the twisted pear-tree: this I saw
In the first dream I had ere I was born.
It is the house of God. He welcomes me.

[*Strides forward.*]

REDFEATHER

That house. God's blood!

OLIVE [*hysterically*]

Is not this hell's own wit?

THE WILD KNIGHT

God grows impatient, and His wine is poured,
His bread is broken.

[*Rushes forward.*]

REDFEATHER [*leaps between*]

Stand away, great fool,
There is a devil there!

THE WILD KNIGHT [*draws his sword, and waves it as he rushes*]

God's house!—God's house!

REDFEATHER [*plucks out his own sword*]

Better my hand than his.

[*The blades clash.*]

God alone knows
What That within might do to you, poor fool,
I can but kill you.

[*They fight.* OLIVE *tries to part them.*]

REDFEATHER

Olive, stand away!

OLIVE

I will not stand away!

[*Steps between the swords.*]

Stranger, a word,
Yes—you are right—God is within that house.

REDFEATHER

Olive !

OLIVE

But He is all too beautiful
For us who only know of stars and flowers.
The thing within is all too pure and fair,

[*Shudders.*]

Too awful in its ancient innocence,
For men to look upon it and not die;
Ourselves would fade into those still white fires
Of peace and mercy.

[*Struggles with her voice.*]

There . . . enough . . . the law—
No flesh shall look upon the Lord and live.

REDFEATHER [*sticking his sword in the ground*]

You are the bravest lady in the world.

THE WILD KNIGHT [*dazed*]

May I not go within ?

REDFEATHER

Keep you the law—
No flesh shall look upon the Lord and live.

THE WILD KNIGHT [*sadly*]

Then I will go and lay me in the flowers,
For He may haply, as in ancient time,
Walk in the garden in the cool of day.

[*He goes out.*]

[OLIVE *reels.* REDFEATHER *catches her.*]

REDFEATHER

You are the strongest woman upon earth.
The weakest woman than the strongest man
Is stronger in her hour: this is the law.
When the hour passes—then may we be strong.

OLIVE [*wildly*]

The House . . . the Face.

REDFEATHER [*fiercely*]

I love you. Look at me!

OLIVE [*turns her face to him*]

I hear six birds sing in that little tree,
Say, is the old earth laughing at my fears?
I think I love you also . . .

REDFEATHER

What I am
You know. But I will never curse a man,
Even in a mirror.

OLIVE [*smiling at him*]

And the Devil's dance?

REDFEATHER

The Devil plotted since the world was young
With alchemies of fire and witches' oils
And magic. But he never made a man.

OLIVE

No, not a man.

REDFEATHER

Not even my Lord Orm.

Look at the house now—

[*She starts and looks.*]

Honest brick and tiles.

OLIVE

You have a strange strength in this hour.

REDFEATHER

This hour

I see with mortal eye as in one flash
The whole divine democracy of things,
And dare the stars to scorn a scavenge-heap.
Olive, I tell you every soul is great.
Weave we green crowns—how noble and how high;
Fling we white flowers—how radiant and how pure

Is he, whoe'er he be, who next shall cross
This scrap of grass . . .

[*Enter* LORD ORM.]

OLIVE [*screams*]

Ah !

REDFEATHER [*pointing to the chapel*]

Olive, go and pray
For a man soon to die. Good day, my Lord.

[*She goes in.*]

LORD ORM

Good day.

REDFEATHER

I am a friend to Lady Olive.

LORD ORM

Sir, you are fortunate.

REDFEATHER

Most fortunate
In finding, sword on thigh and ready, one
Who is a villain and a gentleman.

LORD ORM [*picks up the flagon*]

Empty, I see.

REDFEATHER.

Oh sir, you never drink
You dread to lose yourself before the stars—
Do you not dread to sleep?

LORD ORM [*violently*]

What would you here?

REDFEATHER

Receive from you the title-deeds you hold.

LORD ORM

You entertain me.

REDFEATHER

With a bout at foils?

LORD ORM

I will not fight.

REDFEATHER

I know you better, then.
I have seen men grow mangier than the beasts,
Eat bread with blood upon their fingers, grin
While women burned: but one last law they served.
When I say 'Coward,' is the law awake?

LORD ORM

Hear me, then, too: I have seen robbers rule,
And thieves go clad in gold—age after age—
Because, though sordid, ragged, rude, and mean,
They saw, like gods, no law above their heads.
But when they fell—then for this cause they fell,
This last mean cobweb of the fairy tales
Of good and ill: that they must stand and fight

When a man bade, though they had chose to stand
And fight not. I am stronger than the world.

[*Folds his arms.*]

REDFEATHER [*lifts his hand*]

If in your body be the blood of man,

[*Strikes him.*]

Now let it rush to the face—

God! Have you sunk
Lower than anger?

LORD ORM

How I triumph now.

REDFEATHER [*stamps wildly*]

Damned, whimpering dog! vile, snivelling, sick poltroon!
Are you alive?

LORD ORM

Evil, be thou my good;
Let the sun blacken and the moon be blood:
I have said the words.

REDFEATHER [*studying him*]

And if I struck you dead,
You would turn to daisies !

LORD ORM

And you do not strike.

REDFEATHER [*dreamily*]

Indeed, poor soul, such magic would be kind
And full of pity as a fairy-tale :
One touch of this bright wand [*Lifts his sword*] and down would drop
The dark abortive blunder that is you,
And you would change, forgiven, into flowers.

LORD ORM

And yet—and yet you do not strike me dead.
I do not draw : the sword is in your hand—
Drive the blade through me where I stand.

REDFEATHER

Lord Orm,
You asked the Lady Olive (I can speak
As to a toad to you, my lord)—you asked
Olive to be your paramour: and she—

LORD ORM

Refused.

REDFEATHER

And yet her father was at stake,
And she is soft and kind. Now look at me,
Ragged and ruined, soaked in bestial sins:
My lord, I too have my virginity—
Turn the thing round, my lord, and topside down,
You cannot spell it. Be the fact enough,
I use no sword upon a swordless man.

LORD ORM

For her?

REDFEATHER

I too have my virginity.

LORD ORM

Now look on me: I am the lord of earth,
For I have broken the last bond of man.
I stand erect, crowned with the stars—and why?
Because I stand a coward—because you
Have mercy—on a coward. Do I win?

REDFEATHER

Though there you stand with moving mouth and eyes,
I think, my lord, you are not possible—
God keep you from my dreams.

[*Goes out.*]

LORD ORM

Alone and free.
Since first in flowery meads a child I ran,
My one long thirst—to be alone and free.

Free of all laws, creeds, codes, and common tests,
Shameless, anarchic, infinite.
Why, then,
I might have done in that dark liberty—
If I should say 'a good deed,' men would laugh,
But here are none to laugh.
The godless world
Be thanked there is no God to spy on me,
Catch me and crown me with a vulgar crown
For what I do: if I should once believe
The horror of that ancient Eavesdropper
Behind the starry arras of the skies,
I should—well, well, enough of menaces—
I should not do the thing I come to do.
What do I come to do? Let me but try
To spell it to my soul.
Suppose a man
Perfectly free and utterly alone,
Free of all love of law, equally free

Of all the love of mutiny it breeds,
Free of the love of heaven, and also free
Of all the love of hell it drives us to;
Not merely void of rules, unconscious of them;
So strong that naught alive could do him hurt,
So wise that he knew all things, and so great
That none knew what he was or what he did—
A lawless giant. [*A pause: then in a low voice.*]
Would he not be good?
Hate is the weakness of a thwarted thing,
Pride is the weakness of a thing unpraised.
But he, this man . . .
He would be like a child
Girt with the tomes of some vast library,
Who reads romance after romance, and smiles
When every tale ends well: impersonal
As God he grows—melted in suns and stars;
So would this boundless man, whom none could spy,
Taunt him with virtue, censure him with vice,

Rejoice in all men's joys; with golden pen
Write all the live romances of the earth
To a triumphant close . . .
Alone and free—
In this grey, cool, clean garden, washed with winds,
What do I come to do among the grass,
The daisies, and the dews? An awful thing,
To prove I am that man.
That while these saints
Taunt me with trembling, dare me to revenge,
I breathe an upper air of ancient good
And strong eternal laughter; send my sun
And rain upon the evil and the just,
Turn my left cheek unto the smiter. He
That told me, sword in hand, that I had fallen
Lower than anger, knew not I had risen
Higher than pride . . .
Enough, the deeds are mine.
[*Takes out the title-deeds.*]

I come to write the end of a romance.
A good romance: the characters—Lord Orm,
Type of the starvéd heart and storéd brain,
Who strives to hate and cannot; fronting him—
Redfeather, rake in process of reform,
At root a poet: I have hopes of him:
He can love virtue, for he still loves vice.
He is not all burnt out. He beats me there
(How I beat him in owning it!); in love
He is still young, and has the joy of shame.
And for the Lady Olive—who shall speak?
A man may weigh the courage of a man,
But if there be a bottomless abyss
It is a woman's valour: such as I
Can only bow the knee and hide the face
(Thank God there is no God to spy on me
And bring his curséd crowns).
No, there is none:
The old incurable hunger of the world

Surges in wolfish wars, age after age.
There was no God before me: none sees where,
Between the brute-womb and the deaf, dead grave,
Unhoping, unrecorded, unrepaid,
I make with smoke, fire, and burnt-offering
This sacrifice to Chaos. [*Lights the papers.*] None behold
Me write in fire the end of the romance.
Burn! I am God, and crown myself with stars
Upon creation day: before was night
And chaos of a blind and cruel world.
I am the first God; I will trample hell,
Fight, conquer, make the story of the stars,
Like this poor story, end like a romance:

[*The paper burns.*]

Before was brainless night: but I am God
In this black world I rend. Let there be light!

[*The paper blazes up, illuminating the garden.*]

I, God . . .

THE WILD KNIGHT [*rushes forward*]

God's Light! God's Voice; yes, it is He
Walking in Eden in the cool of the day!

LORD ORM [*screams*]

Tricked! Caught!
Damned screeching rat in a hole!

[*Stabs him again and again with his sword; stamps on his face.*]

THE WILD KNIGHT [*faintly*]

Earth grows too beautiful around me: shapes
And colours fearfully wax fair and clear,
For I have heard, as thro' a door ajar,
Scraps of the huge soliloquy of God
That moveth as a mask the lips of man,
If man be very silent: they were right,
No flesh shall look upon the Lord and live.

[*Dies.*]

LORD ORM [*staggers back laughing*]

Saved, saved, my secret.

REDFEATHER [*rushing in, sword in hand*]

The drawn sword at last!

Guard, son of hell!

[*They fight.* ORM *falls.* OLIVE *comes in.*]

He too can die. Keep back!

Olive, keep back from him! I did not fear
Him living, and he fell before my sword;
But dead I fear him. All is ended now;
A man's whole life tied in a bundle there,
And no good deed. I fear him. Come away.

GOOD NEWS

BETWEEN a meadow and a cloud that sped
  In rain and twilight, in desire and fear,
  I heard a secret—hearken in your ear,
'Behold the daisy has a ring of red.'

That hour, with half of blessing, half of ban,
  A great voice went through heaven and earth and hell,
  Crying, 'We are tricked, my great ones, is it well?
Now is the secret stolen by a man.'

Then waxed I like the wind because of this,
  And ran, like gospel and apocalypse,
  From door to door, with new anarchic lips,
Crying the very blasphemy of bliss.

GOOD NEWS

In the last wreck of Nature, dark and dread,
Shall in eclipse's hideous hieroglyph,
One wild form reel on the last rocking cliff,
And shout, 'The daisy has a ring of red.'

THE NEGLECTED CHILD

(Dedicated, in a glow of Christmas charity, to a philanthropic society)

THE Teachers in the Temple
  They did not lift their eyes
For the blazing star on Bethlehem
  Or the Wise Men grown wise.

They heeded jot and tittle,
  They heeded not a jot
The rending voice of Ramah
  And the children that were not.

Or how the panic of the poor
  Choked all the field with flight,
Or how the red sword of the rich
  Ran ravening through the night.

THE NEGLECTED CHILD

They made their notes; while naked
  And monstrous and obscene
A tyrant bathed in all the blood
  Of men that might have been.

But they did chide Our Lady
  And tax her for this thing,
That she had lost Him for a time
  And sought Him sorrowing.

TO A TURK

WARRIOR by warriors smitten,
  Gambler whose luck has turned,
Read not the small words written,
  Who know what love you earned :
You know, and none shall tell you,
  What and how long and how
They did endure in silence
  That smite in silence now.

A Liberal may belabour
  With rods your reckless dead,
As the Tory licked your sabre
  For the blood he dared not shed ;
Since from the creedless chapel
  And the cushioned prize-ring came

TO A TURK

The men that feared your glory
  And they that praised your shame.

With us too rage against the rood
  Your devils and your swine;
A colder scorn of womanhood,
  A baser fear of wine,
And lust without the harem,
  And Doom without the God.
Go. It is not this rabble
  Sayeth to you 'Ichabod.'

Because our sorrow has sufficed
  And what we know we know;
And because you were great, Lord Antichrist,
  In the name of Christ you go;
But you shall not turn your turban
  For the little dogs that yell,
When a man rides out of a city:
  In the name of God; farewell.

THE ARISTOCRAT

The Devil is a gentleman, and asks you down to stay
At his little place at What'sitsname (it isn't far away).
They say the sport is splendid; there is always something new,
And fairy scenes, and fearful feats that none but he can do;
He can shoot the feathered cherubs if they fly on the estate,
Or fish for Father Neptune with the mermaids for a bait:
He scaled amid the staggering stars that precipice, the sky,
And blew his trumpet above heaven; and got by mastery

The starry crown of God Himself, and shoved it on the shelf;
But the Devil is a gentleman and doesn't brag himself.

O blind your eyes and break your heart and hack your hand away,
And lose your love and shave your head; but do not go to stay
At the little place in What'sitsname where folks are rich and clever;
The golden and the goodly house, where things grow worse for ever;
There are things you need not know of, though you live and die in vain,
There are souls more sick of pleasure than you are sick of pain;
There is a game of April Fool that's played behind its door,
Where the fool remains for ever and the April comes no more,

THE ARISTOCRAT

Where the splendour of the daylight grows drearier than
the dark,
And life droops like a vulture that once was such a lark ;
And that is the Blue Devil that once was the Blue Bird ;
For the Devil is a gentleman, and doesn't keep his word.

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